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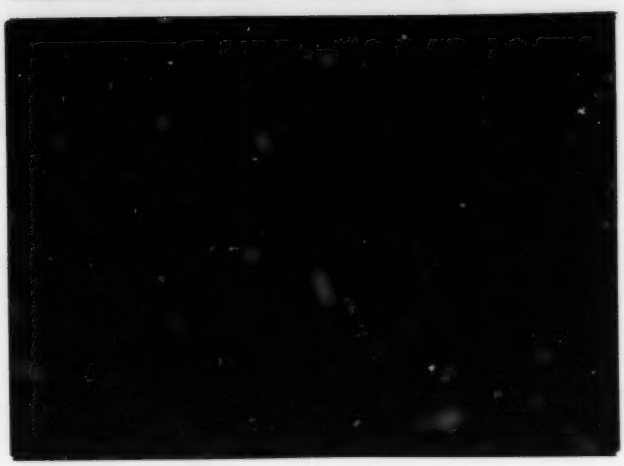

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WORKING PAPER 32

INDIAN NAVAL EXPANSION

By

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PREFACE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The paper discusses the origins of the drive to enhance Indian naval capability and presents the background to India's regional security policy. India's defence ties with the Soviet Union are charted and the question of the transfer of a nuclear-powered submarine to India is examined. It is argued that Moscow's purpose in introducing such a vessel into the region is two-fold. First, India's acquisition of a nuclear-powered submarine complicates US naval strategy in the region and forces Washington to respond in ways which may be politically damaging. Second, by leasing an advanced weapon system to India, Moscow retains its leverage over New Delhi and weakens the growth of closer US-Indian ties at a time when its influence over India is waning because of economic strains and technological shortcomings in the Soviet Union. Moscow's objective has more to do with its strategic competition with Washington than with its desire to build-up India's naval capability. This effort coincides with an improvement in US-Indian relations to the degree that there is a greater understanding in New Delhi about Washington's stabilizing role in the vital Persian Gulf region. It appears likely that Washington and New Delhi will arrive at a mutually acceptable balance of naval forces in the Indian Ocean and that both countries will recognize the legitimate security concerns each other has in the region.

The paper argues that India's naval expansion, which began as a response to perceived security threats to India arising out of strategic circumstances which no longer have any bearing on the regional security situation, is today motivated primarily by notions of prestige. India sees itself as a great power, and great powers have strong navies. Even if it has larger ambitions, India will be inhibited from developing a stronger naval position in the Indian Ocean by domestic economic pressures and its continued dependence on outside sources for advanced weapons systems. Moreover, India's naval force structure, with its absence of a significant power projection capability, does not pose a threat to other states in the Indian Ocean region.

Analysis of India's defence priorities in the Indian Ocean points to a long-term strategy of meeting a potential Chinese incursion into the Indian Ocean at the key choke point in the east -- the Strait of Malacca. An assessment of India's maritime force structure reveals that

New Delhi is seeking to attain a sea-denial capability in the Indian Ocean. There is no evidence, from policy statements or in the make-up of the developing naval force, that India has ambitions further afield or that it is seeking a sea-control capability.

Nevertheless, India's naval expansion is out of place in an era when economic strength has largely supplanted military power as a means by which to measure the strength of nations. No matter what government is in power in New Delhi, India will continue to strive to be recognized as a legitimate regional, and ultimately, global power. Although there are no indications that India has aggressive intentions towards the Indian Ocean region, interested parties should be alert to developments in India's naval capability.

CONDENSÉ

L'Inde est devenue la principale puissance de l'Asie du Sud depuis sa victoire sur le Pakistan dans la guerre du Bangladesh en 1971. Au cours des dernières années, elle a augmenté ses forces navales d'une manière qui donne à penser qu'elle cherche à accroître son rôle dans la vaste région de l'océan Indien. L'acquisition continue de systèmes d'armes perfectionnés, notamment des porte-avions et des sous-marins à propulsion atomique, laisse supposer que New Delhi voit plus grand que la simple défense de ses territoires et de son voisinage immédiat, hypothèse qui soulève une certaine appréhension. Le présent document évalue l'incidence d'une telle expansion de la puissance navale indienne sur la paix et la sécurité dans la région de l'océan Indien.

New Delhi s'est sentie frustrée par son incapacité de se faire reconnaître officiellement comme superpuissance régionale par les États extra-régionaux qui, en matière de sécurité, ont des intérêts dans l'océan Indien. L'accroissement progressif des forces navales des superpuissances dans l'océan Indien à la fin des années 1970 a renforcé, à New Delhi, l'impression qu'en général, on ne considérait pas l'Inde comme une puissance régionale de plein droit, ce qui était nettement inacceptable par rapport à l'image que désirait projeter le gouvernement indien. Cependant, en l'absence d'une menace navale manifeste, cette situation ne justifie pas l'ampleur de l'expansion navale que l'Inde a entreprise il y a quelques années.

Le présent document examine l'origine des efforts que l'Inde déploie pour accroître sa puissance navale et explique les causes de la politique du pays concernant la sécurité régionale. Les liens qui relient l'Inde et l'URSS en matière de défense y sont documentés, et la question de la cession à l'Inde d'un sous-marin à propulsion atomique est analysée. On prétend que Moscou a deux raisons d'envoyer ce bâtiment dans la région. Tout d'abord, l'acquisition d'un tel sous-marin par l'Inde complique la stratégie navale des États-Unis dans la région et oblige Washington à réagir d'une façon susceptible de lui nuire politiquement. Ensuite, en dotant l'Inde d'un système d'armement perfectionné, Moscou maintient son emprise sur New Delhi et ralentit le processus de rapprochement entre les États-Unis et l'Inde, au moment où l'influence soviétique sur l'État indien diminue en raison des contraintes économiques et des

problèmes technologiques que connaît actuellement l'URSS. Les motifs de Moscou tiennent davantage de la rivalité stratégique l'opposant à Washington qu'à son désir d'accroître la puissance navale de l'Inde. En outre, ce geste est fait au moment où les relations américano-indiennes s'améliorent au point où New Delhi comprend maintenant davantage le rôle stabilisateur de Washington dans la région vitale du golfe Persique. Il semble probable que Washington et New Delhi en arriveront à un équilibre des forces navales dans l'océan Indien qui satisfera les deux pays et que ceux-ci reconnaîtront que leurs préoccupations mutuelles en matière de sécurité dans la région sont légitimes.

Le document fait valoir que l'accroissement des forces navales de l'Inde, qui s'est amorcé en réaction aux menaces contre la sécurité de l'État, lesquelles découlaient de circonstances stratégiques qui n'influent désormais plus sur la sécurité de la région, est aujourd'hui surtout motivé par un désir de prestige. À ses propres yeux, l'Inde est une grande puissance, et les grandes puissances possèdent des marines fortes. Toutefois, malgré des projets ambitieux, l'Inde aura du mal à renforcer sa présence navale dans l'océan Indien, vu les pressions économiques intérieures et le fait qu'elle doit s'adresser à des sources extérieures pour se procurer des armes modernes. Qui plus est, la marine indienne, de par sa composition, est incapable de projeter sa puissance à une grande distance; elle ne constitue donc pas un danger pour les autres États de la région.

L'analyse des priorités de l'Inde en matière de défense dans l'océan Indien laisse entrevoir une stratégie à long terme pour faire échec à une éventuelle incursion de la Chine dans la région par l'important goulot d'étranglement situé à l'Est : le détroit de Malacca. Quiconque analyse la composition de la marine indienne constate que le pays cherche à acquérir une capacité d'interdiction dans l'océan Indien. Par contre, rien dans les énoncés de politique ou dans la constitution de ses forces navales en croissance ne prouve que l'Inde nourrit d'autres ambitions ou qu'elle essaie d'acquérir la suprématie navale.

Quoiqu'il en soit, l'accroissement des forces navales de l'Inde est déplacé à une époque où l'économie a largement supplanté le pouvoir militaire comme mesure de puissance des nations. Peu importe quel gouvernement est au pouvoir à New Delhi, l'Inde continuera de

déployer tous les efforts voulus pour se faire reconnaître comme puissance régionale de plein droit et, éventuellement, comme puissance mondiale.

New Delhi n'ayant pas justifié l'accroissement de ses forces navales, ses voisins se sentent menacés par ses activités et ont décidé de se protéger. Certains États du littoral ont déjà réagi en augmentant leurs propres forces et en améliorant leurs installations. L'Indonésie, le Pakistan et l'Australie, par exemple, ont surveillé les faits et gestes de l'Inde et ont répondu en adoptant des mesures politiques et militaires. Même si rien ne laisse croire que New Delhi ait des intentions belliqueuses à l'égard des autres pays de la région de l'océan Indien, les parties intéressées auront tout avantage à suivre la situation de près.

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Introduction

India has been the predominant power in South Asia since its victory over Pakistan in the 1971 Bangladesh war, but has been frustrated by its inability to secure explicit recognition of its regional superpower status from extra-regional states with security interests in the Indian Ocean area. The steady build-up of the superpowers' naval forces in the Indian Ocean at the end of the 1970s reinforced the perception in New Delhi that India was not widely regarded as a legitimate regional power. In terms of New Delhi's self-image, this situation was clearly unacceptable, but in the absence of a conspicuous maritime threat, hardly seems cause for the kind of naval expansion India has undertaken in recent years.

New Delhi has been building up its naval forces in a manner which suggests that it is seeking to play a greater role in the broader Indian Ocean region. The ongoing acquisition of sophisticated naval systems, including aircraft carriers and a nuclear-powered submarine, raises concern that New Delhi has more heroic ambitions than simply defending its property and immediate neighbourhood. Because New Delhi has failed to explain the purpose of its naval build-up, its neighbours feel threatened by its actions and have responded in kind. Some of the key littoral states have already reacted to India's naval expansion by enhancing their forces and improving their facilities. Indonesia, Pakistan and Australia, for example, have all noted and responded to India's moves at the political and military level. The purpose of this paper is to assess the significance of India's maritime expansion for peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.

Background

For most of the period since its independence in 1947, Indian defence policy has reflected the historical vulnerability of the subcontinent to threats from its land frontiers. As such, New Delhi's security priorities have developed from roots deep in the legacy of British dominion in India. In fact, contemporary Indian security goals are analogous to the fundamental strategic objectives of the British: to deny any extra-regional power a role in the affairs of South Asia and to be the dominant power in the region.

In the British period, these objectives were assured by a forward defence policy on the frontiers of India and by total British dominance of the Indian Ocean. In the same way that the British played the "Great Game" with the Russians to win dominance of the subcontinent, modern India continues to manipulate regional tensions in order to deflect direct threats to its position and to secure its authority in the region. To this end, military strength has overshadowed diplomacy in New Delhi's effort to promote its national interests.

India has sought to control its reluctant neighbours in a series of conflicts -- some major, as with Pakistan in 1948, 1965 and 1971, and some minor, like Goa (1961) and Sikkim (1975). India's willingness to use military force in support of its regional policy continued in the 1980s, most notably in the Siachin glacier dispute[1] with Pakistan and with interventions in Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 1987 and 1988. In other cases, and on occasion after military force has established New Delhi's interest in a preferred outcome, treaties, accords and exchanges of letters with its neighbours have given a semblance of legality to India's dominant position in South Asia. Still, one key aspect of subcontinental defence has changed since colonial times. Whereas Great Britain secured its interests in India by pursuing a de facto sea-control strategy in the Indian Ocean, India has neither the authority over the littoral states enjoyed by the British, nor access to the key naval bases at Aden, Simonstown and Singapore -- the entrance points to the ocean. More importantly, British maritime primacy in the Indian Ocean was never really challenged. India faces a far different situation today.

The superpowers maintain permanent naval deployments in the Indian Ocean and many lesser external and regional maritime powers are also active in the region. There has been an ongoing debate between India and the extra-regional powers, most notably the United States, over the legitimacy of their "presence" in the Indian Ocean. This sometimes acrimonious dispute has its origins in the earliest days of independent India and has encompassed Indian activity in the Non-Aligned Movement, through New Delhi's support for the Indian Ocean as a Zone

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[1] India and Pakistan have been engaged in hostilities on the 20,000 foot Siachin glacier since 1984 -- the world's highest battlefield. Casualties on Siachin number in the hundreds, due largely to the altitude and accidents, not military action.

Of Peace (IOZOP) proposal. New Delhi's overriding policy has always been to keep Indian Ocean affairs in the hands of Indian Ocean states -- preferably under the leadership of India. In this context, it is not unreasonable to suggest that India is concerned about extra-regional activity in its immediate area because, after all, it is the *Indian* Ocean. This is an increasingly important point for, as one analyst has succinctly put it: "The Indian Ocean, unlike the Arabian Sea, the English Channel and the Irish Sea, is to be not only proximately, but strategically, defined by its adjective."[2]

After independence, New Delhi first tried to exclude external powers from the affairs of South Asia by seeking bilateral relations with its neighbours. In the 1950s, it was unsuccessful in trying to establish a regional economic and security system centred on India.[3] What Indian policymakers failed to recognize was that the post-war interdependent world offered little opportunity for independent action by newly emerging states. Nor were its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, enthraled at the prospect of a future under India's wing. Parochial Indian interests were soon overtaken by the Cold War strategic rivalry of the United States and the Soviet Union, whose global competition quickly extended to the subcontinent.

From V ashington's perspective, a strong Pakistan stood as a bulwark against growing communist influence in South Asia -- the prospects for which looked increasingly good following Khrushchev's successful visit to India in 1955. Similarly, the Soviets saw their ties with India countering US influence in Pakistan and as a challenge to Washington's policy of containing communism. After the Sino-Soviet split, Moscow's friendship with New Delhi served the additional Soviet role of containing China. For Pakistan, membership in the SEATO and CENTO alliances offered an opportunity to gain military and diplomatic support against its traditional enemy. Finally, Pakistan's alliances appeared threatening to India and it sought

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[2] McKinley, Michael. "At Anarchy's Rim: Australia and the Indian Ocean." Unpublished paper, Australian National University, December 8, 1988. p. 25.

[3] For in-depth analysis of this period see: Rose, Leo E. "India And Its Neighbors: Regional Foreign And Security Politics" in Lawrence Ziring (Ed.) *The Subcontinent In World Politics*, New York: Praeger, 1982, pp. 37-41.

greater security cooperation with the Soviet Union.[4] Hence the entrenched regional rivalry that typifies most of contemporary South Asian history.

This sketch of the post-partition evolution of South Asian relations tells only part of the story, however, because it deals with a bipolar system of great power rivalry. In reality, an overriding triangular competition between Moscow, Washington and Beijing has been superimposed onto the regional conflict between India and Pakistan.

As an Asian power, China has for years actively confronted Indian perceptions of its regional dominance. India suffered its only military defeat at the hands of China in the Himalayas in 1962, but the participation of China in the affairs of South Asia has developed as more of a political challenge to India than as a military threat. Although the Chinese victory had meaningful strategic importance, in that it led to significant improvements in India's military posture in the north of the country, it has had more long-term relevance in terms of Indian esteem. The humiliation of the defeat, and the fact that the border issue with China remains unresolved, has had a bearing on the development of Indian defence and foreign policy that cannot be underestimated. Because of the defeat in 1962, India suffers under an immense psychological burden of inferiority when viewing its relations with China.

This feeling is compounded by what New Delhi perceives to be a lack of international respect for India's standing in the world. It is particularly irritating to Indian policymakers, for example, that China is recognized as a world power and has a permanent seat on the Security Council.[5] In contrast, India, which has virtually the same attributes of power as China -- in

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[4] Precisely the same arguments developed during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, where American weapons supplies to Pakistan appeared to pose more of a potential threat to India.

[5] One of India's leading strategic thinkers, K. Subrahmanyam, regularly expresses his bitterness over this issue in the following terms: "One out of every six people in the world is an Indian... But you in the West devised a world order in which the second largest country isn't even a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. That's a big omission." Quoted in: Munro, Ross H. "Superpower Rising," *Time*, April 3, 1989, p. 9-10.

terms of population, resources, and nuclear potential -- is regarded as a South Asian actor and is widely equated with Pakistan. This question of prestige is crucial to the entire debate on the growth in Indian naval capability and will be returned to later in this study.

Undoubtedly, China has structured its relations with the region to keep India off balance. Beijing has given military and economic assistance to India's neighbours, and is particularly close to Pakistan. In fact, the threat China poses to India is really more in the area of regional influence than in a truly military sense. India is so dominant in its immediate environment that the regional balance of power could not change other than by a major, and increasingly unlikely, confrontation between India and China. Nonetheless, India has made rapid advances in missile technology largely in response to the threat posed by Chinese military modernization.

In reality, Pakistan is India's only military rival in South Asia, and remains so simply because of the security assistance that it receives from the United States. In the 1980s, the growth in Pakistani military capability arising out of US assistance against the Soviet threat from Afghanistan has continued New Delhi's emphasis on the development of its land and air power. India has pursued its regional objectives by maintaining an ambiguous arms-length security relationship with the Soviet Union, by restructuring its forces to meet contingencies on the mountain frontier with China, and by offsetting US assistance to Pakistan by building-up its land and air forces. India's traditional security concerns will remain focused on its land borders with Pakistan and China. It has, thus far, failed to limit the presence of foreign naval powers in its surrounding waters.

The Origin of India's Naval Expansion

Indian apprehension over foreign naval powers operating in the Indian Ocean is well established and has its origins in the so-called Enterprise incident, when the United States sent a carrier-task force into the Bay of Bengal during the Bangladesh war. The inability of the Indian fleet, engaged in bombarding Pakistani coastal installations, to prevent the US task force from moving at will through its operational area had an impact on Indian naval planning that

has been likened to the effect the Cuban missile crisis had on Soviet strategic policy.[6] India's pride was severely bruised by the US action, which blemished its attainment of regional dominance at the precise moment of victory. Without a doubt the incident has had a direct bearing on India's naval expansion programme and Indian strategic commentators regularly refer to it as proof positive of the security threat India faces from the Indian Ocean.[7] This is entirely in keeping with the central argument of India's security ethos: that India faces a growing external threat. Of more significance, the Enterprise incident served as a catalyst for change in Indian strategic thinking. It focused attention in New Delhi on the Indian Ocean as a third strategic arena just as the Americans and Soviets were beginning to challenge each other in the Indian Ocean. Since that time, the presence of foreign naval forces in the Indian Ocean has repeatedly been given as justification for New Delhi's major investment in naval power.[8]

The growing superpower naval rivalry coincided with regional efforts to have the Indian Ocean declared a Zone of Peace. This movement had been building since the late 1960s when the Soviets began regular deployments into the ocean and the United States entered into its agreement with the British to establish a base on the island of Diego Garcia. The Zone of Peace proposal was drafted at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Lusaka in 1970 and introduced by Sri Lanka in the United Nations General Assembly in October 1971. The vote on the resolution took place, interestingly, on 16 December 1971 -- the day after the Enterprise

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[6] After the Cuban Missile Crisis was over, Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetzov reportedly told an adviser to President Kennedy: "We will not let you do this to us again." See: McKinley, Michael. "At Anarchy's Rim: Australia and the Indian Ocean," 8 December, 1988, Unpublished, p. 16.

[7] See: Mansingh, Surjit. "India And The Superpowers: 1966-1984." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. XX11, 3-4 (1987) p. 273. According to an Indian Navy officer involved in planning the expansion program, one of its goals is to make it too risky by the year 2000 for either superpower to act in a hostile manner in the northern Indian Ocean. See: Munro, Ross H. "Superpower Rising," *Time*, April 3, 1989, p. 13.

[8] According to one analyst, the Indian naval build-up has "the sole objective of contending with the ingress of superpower navies into the Indian Ocean region." Marwah, Onkar. "India's Strategic Perspectives On The Indian Ocean." in William Lee Dowdy and Russell Trood (Eds.) *The Indian Ocean: Perspectives On A Strategic Arena*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1985. p. 315.

incident. Sixty-one states voted for the resolution, but fifty-five other countries abstained including the major maritime powers. The only states unequivocally in favour of it were Sri Lanka, Tanzania and India.[9] Since then, the Zone of Peace proposal has become a perennial feature of the United Nation's agenda although it is no closer to being implemented than it was back in 1971.[10] However, the proposal has become a useful political tool by which India has consistently argued for the exclusion of external powers from the Indian Ocean. Such a condition would, of course, effectively leave the Indian Navy in a position to control the ocean.

As US-Soviet detente broke down in the late 1970s, a series of crises -- in the Horn of Africa, the Yemens, Iran and Afghanistan -- led to the permanent deployment of US and Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean. The development of US naval facilities on the island base of Diego Garcia, together with the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force -- which was specifically charged with intervening in India's perceived security region -- aroused further concern in New Delhi's strategic circles. Having consistently failed to reduce superpower force levels through UN resolution, New Delhi was persuaded at the end of the 1970s to pursue the development of its own "blue-water" naval capability. It is evident, however, that India does not require a blue-water fleet to meet any threat from its regional neighbours. Many observers feel that the pattern of Indian naval expansion, together with a regularly demonstrated willingness by New Delhi to use force in support of its foreign policy objectives, points to a long-range goal of achieving the military means to dominate the wider Indian Ocean region.

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[9] "...other countries either voted without comment or else expressed misgivings over the operational parts of the resolution (particularly Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia.) Altogether about half the Indian Ocean littoral states shared such misgivings." See: Braun, Dieter. *The Indian Ocean*, London: C. Hurst & Company, 1983. pp.172-186.

[10] Nor do its prospects look good for the future: "The United States, Britain and France have announced that they are quitting the United Nations Committee on the Indian Ocean in protest of what they said was its practice of reaching decisions without consensus and of blaming big powers for the region's problems." *India Abroad*, April 27, 1990.

India's Regional Policy

Indian regional policy has developed from the so-called "Indira Doctrine," by which India claimed the right to intervene in the affairs of neighbouring states if internal disorder threatened Indian security. The following policy principles underlie India's doctrinal approach to its relations with South Asia:

> India has no intention of intervening in the internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any others;
>
> India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication; and,
>
> no South Asian government must ask for external military assistance with an anti-Indian bias from any country.[11]

Under what became known as the South Asian Doctrine, the true nature of Indira Gandhi's non-interventionist policy was revealed as her son and successor implemented what has since become known as the Rajiv Doctrine. The interventions in Sri Lanka (July 1987-March 1990) and the Maldives (November 1988) confirmed New Delhi's calculated commitment of its military power to the furtherance of its political objectives. These were relatively minor demonstrations of power-politics in which New Delhi ran no risk of running into superior opposition. Nevertheless, in a sure test of India's military capabilities, some 45,000 Indian troops were unable to defeat an estimated 2,000 Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka and the Indian forces suffered heavy losses.[12] For all intents and purposes and despite India's military strength, the Sri Lanka operation was costly and largely unsuccessful. Conversely, the Maldives operation was a resounding success and demonstrated, as Rajiv Gandhi said to the Indian Parliament after the intervention, that South Asia, i.e. India, can solve its problems, "among ourselves without

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[11] *Janes Defence Weekly*, December 3, 1988.

[12] Under an agreement signed between President Premedasa and Prime Minister Gandhi in September 1989, all Indian Peace Keeping troops were withdrawn from Sri Lanka by March 1990.

outside interference."[13] Accordingly, India has shown its willingness to intervene in local disputes where it identifies a real or potential risk to its security -- as in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The implementation of the doctrine is clearly in keeping with India's perceived national interest: the exclusion of external powers from regional problems.[14]

International acceptance of the doctrine demands that there be a public invitation from the smaller state before India can intervene. Although there was an invitation to intervene in Sri Lanka, India had made it abundantly clear that it was going to impose on the crisis anyway. New Delhi first attempted to send relief supplies by sea to the Jaffna peninsula, where Tamil rebels were under seige by Sinhalese forces, but when the Sri Lankan Navy frustrated this effort, India then air-dropped token supplies to the Tamils under cover of Indian Air Force fighter escort.

In the Maldives, where a small band of Tamils attempted to overthrow the government, there was an indisputable cry for help but there simply was no threat to India's internal stability or security from the coup attempt. In fact, the intervention in the Maldives reflects India's interest in regional stability in its purest form and demonstrates that New Delhi has developed considerable aplomb in its ability to manage regional affairs. This is potentially a dangerous illusion, however, because Pakistan and China would certainly resist further Indian pretensions in, for example, Azad Kashmir or Aksai Chin.[15] In any event, the aggressive pattern

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[13] See: Data-Ray, Sunanda K. "The Rajiv Doctrine: India as a mini superpower?" *Statesman*, New Delhi, November 13, 1988.

[14] See this author's: "Indian Foot In Sri Lanka Part Of A Bigger Struggle," *Globe And Mail*, Toronto, September 14, 1987. This effort is not confined to excluding superpowers activities. India is also intent on limiting the involvement of other Indian Ocean states in the region.

[15] Other recent examples of India's military assertiveness were potentially much more serious and were clearly designed to prove Indian military potential to Pakistan and China. Operation Brass Tacks, at the end of 1986, was an unnerving war-game involving the largest army manoeuvres ever held by India. It took place only a few miles from the border with Pakistan and involved some 2,500 tanks and 150,000 troops. Other divisional strength military exercises also took place near the Chinese border in 1986.

of Indian behaviour means that it must be considered doubtful that India would wait for an invitation to intervene in its neighbours problems in all situations.

The Sri Lanka Accord was a watershed in South Asian history because it was a clear signal to India's neighbours not to play external powers against it. However, it would be premature for Indian policymakers to assume that the support of, or lack of protest from, the major powers for India's actions in Sri Lanka and the Maldives establishes recognition of India's dominant role in the region. Although President Reagan commended Rajiv Gandhi's willingness to restore order and Margaret Thatcher praised "the speed and professionalism of India's response" to the Maldive crisis, it is unlikely that similar Indian activity, particularly in areas of strategic interest to the superpowers, would be treated so magnanimously.[16] The Rajiv Doctrine is, therefore, an inadequate tool for legitimizing India's broader regional aspirations because it is not a credible policy stance. The United States can enforce its Monroe Doctrine, to which Rajiv's is often compared, because no other state can challenge it militarily; India is not in a similar position. Not only would the superpowers oppose the Rajiv Doctrine if it did not suit their interests, Pakistan will never accept it. Moreover, comparison with the Monroe Doctrine is misleading. India may wish to restrict extra-regional influences, but there is no Indian equivalent to the economic domination the United States enjoys in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, there is an unquestionable determination in New Delhi to exclude other powers from the region. The "Exchange of Letters" between the Indian Prime Minister and President Jayewardene of Sri Lanka, annexed to the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, makes this perfectly clear and also says something about how India envisages its relationship with the neighbourhood.

The dominant focus in Gandhi's letter to Jayewardene is on what are unquestionably Sri Lanka's sovereign affairs. Sri Lanka "agreed to meet some of India's concerns" in areas where foreign powers might have had some impact on the regional security picture. There was to be an "early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence

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[16] *Statesman*, New Delhi, November 13, 1988.

personnel" in Sri Lanka.[17] The port of Trincomalee was not to be made available to the military forces of any other country, "in a manner prejudicial to India's interests." India also secured an assurance that foreign broadcasting organizations operating in Sri Lanka, such as the Voice of America, would not serve any military or intelligence purposes. In short, the peace treaty was a one-sided affair in which India gave clear notice to its regional rivals that Sri Lanka was off-limits.[18] If the Sri Lankan episode reflects New Delhi's intention to implement the South Asian Doctrine, the ongoing development of the Indian Navy could represent an important step towards extending its tenets to the larger Indian Ocean region. Naval developments are, however, only one stage in a much more complex process.

If regional dominance is in fact New Delhi's ultimate objective, then there should be evidence of an evolving Indian Ocean policy encompassing a range of measures designed to enhance India's long-term position. These measures would include:

A general expansion of India's military forces, particularly the navy;

reduced extra-regional influence in the region, especially in terms of naval deployments;

the removal of Pakistan as a security threat, by military or political means;

the broadening of regional economic ties; and,

an expressed intention to protect the wider population of Indian origin in the region.[19]

An assessment of the above conditions in the widest regional context indicates that all have been addressed or are in the process of being met. All elements of the Indian armed forces, and the defence budget, are expanding; before the Iraq crisis erupted, the superpowers were reducing their presence in the Indian Ocean and seemed content to let New Delhi play

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[17] These external powers are unnamed in the Accord. They are recognised as being the United States and Israel.

[18] See: *Exchange of Letters*, annexure to "Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement To Establish Peace And Normalcy In Sri Lanka," July 29, 1987.

[19] Adapted from: Elkin, Jerrold F. and Major W. Andrew Ritezel. "New Delhi's Indian Ocean Policy." *Naval War College Review*, Vol. XL, Number 4, (Autumn 1987) pp.51.

a greater role in policing the Indian Ocean[20]; India is expanding its economic ties throughout the Indian Ocean as part of its interest in South-South cooperation under the rubric of the G-15 summits, as well as bilaterally; and concern for the well-being of the majority population of Indian origin in Fiji following the coup by the Fijian army in 1987 led to an Indian diplomatic campaign against the regime that culminated in the expulsion of Indian diplomats from Fiji in June 1990.[21]

The situation with respect to Pakistan has moved dramatically from political efforts to resolve the Siachin dispute towards the end of Gandhi's administration, to a near-war situation over Kashmir with the advent of the V.P. Singh government. The situation remains highly unstable following the election of new governments in Pakistan and India.[22] The consistent rhetoric coming out of New Delhi indicates that neutralization of the Pakistani threat to India is a prime objective of the government.[23] These developments do suggest that India has an evolving, albeit unstated, foreign policy goal of achieving undisputed dominance of the Indian Ocean region. However, any such inference must consider that India also has legitimate security interests in the Indian Ocean.

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[20] The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has, of course, reversed the trend towards a reduction in extra-regional naval forces in the Indian Ocean. Only time will tell if this is a permanent reversal but reductions seem likely to continue after the crisis is over.

[21] The Indian Navy has also reportedly prepared staff papers discussing the logistics of sending a naval force to Fiji. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 June, 1990.

[22] Nawaz Sharif replaced Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister of Pakistan in October 1990, following Bhutto's unceremonious removal from office the previous August. Chandra Shekar replaced V.P. Singh in November 1990, following a vote of no-confidence against Singh in the Indian parliament.

[23] The same is true from the Pakistani side and the crisis between the two countries may yet lead to a war which neither side really wants or can afford. From Islamabad's perspective, the conflict hinges on the fact that Pakistan is the only South Asian state capable of resisting India's hegemonic ambitions. In New Delhi, Pakistan's resistance to Indian dominance is seen as a security threat.

Indian Defence Priorities in the Indian Ocean

With a population of some 800,000,000 and an area of subcontinental proportions to defend, it is not unreasonable that India should maintain a substantial military capability. There has been steady growth in all departments of the Indian armed forces. Since 1965 the army has expanded from 825,000 men to 1,100,000 in 1989, the air force from 28,000 to 110,000, and the navy from 16,000 to 47,000. These are undoubtedly huge increases but do not seem unreasonable when it is noted that the population of India has grown from 470,000,000 to its present size in the same period.[24]

India has the world's fourth largest armed forces, the fifth largest air force and the sixth largest navy. These facts aside, India's defence spending is not excessive -- some 3.5% of its GNP -- in comparison with Pakistan (6.5%) and the United States (6.7%).[25] Nevertheless, the steady growth of India's economy means that defence spending will continue to increase in absolute terms. If the present rate of 3.5% of GNP remains stable, the Indian military budget will double in twenty years.[26] India has also had the highest average growth in military spending in the world at 7% per year since 1975[27] and the military build-up is continuing. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) lists India as the largest importer of modern weapons in the world, second only to Iraq, for the period 1983-87.[28] Despite such

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[24] All figures from *The Military Balance*. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1965-66, 1989-90.

[25] Figures as of 1986. Source: *The Military Balance*, 1988-89. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1988, pp. 224-226. Later estimates put the Indian defence budget at 4.7% of GNP, which is still not excessive by global standards. See: Cheung, Tai-Ming. "Build-up Backlash," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 27, 1989. p. 18.

[26] "Rising Regional Powers: India and China: Comparing Two Developing Powers Out Twenty Years". *Bulletin*, Washington: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, No.3, November 1988, p.15.

[27] As reported in *India Abroad*, February 10, 1989.

[28] Quoted in, *India Abroad*, November 11 1988. In 1987 alone, Indian arms imports reportedly totalled US$5.2 billion. Cheung, Tai-Ming. "Build-up Backlash," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 27, 1989, p. 18.

growth, there has always been an implied reluctance to develop India's military inventory and New Delhi has historically justified its defence purchases in terms of the threat posed by Washington's arming of Pakistan.[29] This is a specious argument, however, because India's broad-based defence modernization programmeme is much larger than Pakistan's.[30]

Indian defence expenditure is not confined to imports from the global arms market, there is also a well developed indigenous capability based on India's considerable military-industrial base in the production of armour, artillery, and aviation. India is testing a domestically designed main battle tank, *Arjuni*[31]; it is developing a light combat aircraft to be ready by the mid-1990s; and most significantly, India has demonstrated its determination to achieve self-reliance in missile technology by becoming the fifth country in the world to have an intermediate range ballistic missile capability with the successful launch of its 2,000-km. range *Agni* missile on 22 May, 1989. Therefore, defence expenditure appears likely to go up rather than down in the future. However, other domestic factors could alter this trend. Although India's military-industrial complex has evolved to the point where the country is poised to become independent of much of its reliance on Soviet arms, India's defence budget adds increasing pressure to the country's severe economic situation. Moreover, it is doubtful that India can maintain the current level of defence spending in the face of growing demands for the allocation of more resources to the rural sector, where the majority of Indians live and work.

Clearly, the qualitative development of Indian military technology will determine New Delhi's capacity for regional intervention in the future. The growth in land and air power and

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[29] This tradition continues. In reply to the question: "Even if there is not a war [with Pakistan], will India have to increase its defence spending?" Prime Minister Singh replied: "Our defence budget is made in Islamabad. We have no choice but to increase spending." Interview with V.P. Singh, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 May 1990.

[30] For example, India's $1.3 billion order of heavy artillery pieces from Bofors in 1986 alone was reportedly the equivalent of about five years worth of US military aid to Pakistan. See: Munro, Ross H. "Superpower Rising," *Time*, April 3, 1989, p. 13.

[31] India plans to manufacture 1,500 of these Main Battle Tanks before the year 2000. See: *The Military Balance - 1989-1990*, London, IISS, 1989, p. 150.

the development of missile capability is expressly tied to the threats perceived to emanate from India's traditional enemies, China and Pakistan. However, neither regional nor extra-regional threats to Indian security seem to explain or justify the growth of the Indian navy. An examination of the major developments in the force structure since 1965 is revealing:

1965	1975	1985
1 Aircraft Carrier	1 Aircraft Carrier	1 Aircraft Carrier
2 Cruisers	2 Cruisers	1 Cruiser
3 Destroyers	3 Destroyers	3 Destroyers
8 Frigates	26 Frigates	23 Frigates
6 Minesweepers	8 Minesweepers	19 Minesweepers
2 Amphibious	4 Amphibious	13 Amphibious
39 Naval Aircraft	8 Submarines	8 Submarines
	89 Naval Aircraft	62 Naval Aircraft

There does not appear to be anything extraordinary about the naval build-up in the twenty years to 1985. Indeed, given India's regional responsibilities and trading patterns it would seem to be a modest response to rapidly changing circumstances in the Indian Ocean. Additions to the fleet since 1985, however, have caused more concern:[32]

1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
1 Aircraft Carrier	2 Aircraft Carriers	2 Aircraft Carriers
3 Destroyers	4 Destroyers	5 Destroyers
23 Frigates	21 Frigates	24 Frigates
18 Minesweepers	18 Minesweepers	17 Minesweepers
11 Amphibious	13 Amphibious	10 Amphibious
8 Submarines	11 Submarines	14 Submarines
50 Naval Aircraft	50 Naval Aircraft	(including 1 nuclear-powered)
		81 Naval Aircraft

It is, of course, the leasing of a Soviet *Charlie*-class nuclear-powered submarine (the INS *Chakra*) in early 1988 that has caused the most controversy. Thus far, the submarine serves training purposes, with Soviet sailors on board, and is most probably not armed with its normal complement of cruise missiles. It is when the potential of this major force multiplier is considered in light of the acquisition of India's second aircraft carrier in mid-1987, and the navy's stated determination to purchase or build a third carrier in the near future, that legitimate

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[32] All tables from *The Military Balance*, 1965-66, 1975-76, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89.

questions begin to be raised about India's strategic purpose.[33] Figures for 1989 show basically the same force layout as in 1988 with the notable difference being that three more conventional submarines have been added to the underwater inventory. In a region such as the Indian Ocean, where most states have weak naval forces and few resources to devote to their expansion, a powerful naval force projection capability obviously has a potentially significant bearing on regional stability. India has by far the largest naval capability of all the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and regional stability will strongly depend on New Delhi's future geopolitical intentions.

India does, of course, have legitimate reasons for maintaining a strong navy. Geography should not be overlooked for India is more than the inverted triangle hanging from the Himalayas. India also has Indian Ocean possessions. The Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi islands, collectively known as Lakshadweep, lie in the Arabian Sea 100 nautical miles off the southwest coast of India. The Andaman and Nicobar islands are close to the Strait of Malacca at the eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal. India also has an important cultural and economic interest in the well-being of the large populations of Indian origin who live throughout the region.[34]

The navy is charged with controlling sea communications and protecting the island territories as well as India's very large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). India's maritime interests cannot but grow with increased exploitation of the resources in and below its EEZ. Indeed, the decision to build-up the navy coincided with popular demands that measures be taken to protect India's sea-lanes and the country's offshore resources. Whatever its ultimate

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[33] There are no public indications as to the future size of the Indian Navy but it is believed that India intends to develop a force centred on three carrier battle groups, supported by six nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines. See: O'Ballance, Edgar. "India's South Asian Doctrine," *Armed Forces*, May 1989 p. 226. Also, McKinley, Michael. *Op. cit.* p. 22.

[34] This interest was explicitly demonstrated by India's intervention on behalf of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Further afield, India has developed close ties with Mauritius (population 65% Indian origin), has maintained a keen interest in the well-being of the large populations of Indian origin in South Africa and throughout East Africa, as well as in Southeast Asia and Fiji.

designs, India must control the strategic choke points in the Indian Ocean if it is to be preeminent in its maritime approaches. In this regard Indian maritime strategists are no different from their Portuguese, Dutch and British predecessors. This is not the nineteenth century, however, and even if India had the inclination to follow in Britain's footsteps it could not approach the jurisdiction the Royal Navy enjoyed over Suez, Simonstown and Singapore. Absolute control of the Indian Ocean is unattainable in contemporary circumstances. The developing mix of the Indian fleet indicates that New Delhi recognises its sea-control limitations and has chosen another option.

A sea-control strategy for a body of water as large as the Indian Ocean would require far more than India's anticipated three-carrier fleet.[35] Moreover, it would require vessels that packed more punch than the light carriers India currently possesses. Both of India's carriers, the *Viraat* (formerly the Hermes) and the *Vikrant* (formerly the Glory), are transfers from the United Kingdom and have undergone extensive refits in India. They are now configured to carry eight *Sea Harrier* attack aircraft and eight *Sea King* Anti-Submarine Warfare helicopters.[36] This does not suggest that their primary purpose is to spearhead amphibious assaults or to bring great force to bear on distant targets. Besides, India only has one regiment of approximately 1,000 Marines and limited amphibious capability.[37] India's amphibious forces and two light aircraft carriers are adequate for the protection of its major offshore assets, particularly the Nicobar and Andaman islands, but they would not play a significant role in larger-scale

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[35] A third aircraft carrier is to be indigenously built at the Cochin shipyard with French, Soviet and British technical assistance and should be completed by the late 1990s. Since the decision was taken to build this carrier, the Soviet Union has offered to supply India with a Kiev-class aircraft carrier. At the time of writing it is not clear whether India will proceed with domestic construction and end up with four carriers, or if the Soviet offer will result in the abandonment of plans to build an Indian vessel.

[36] Obviously, India will have to acquire many more naval aircraft if it wants to deploy all three carriers simultaneously.

[37] A second Marine regiment is being formed. India's ten amphibious vessels comprise one heavy landing ship (capacity 200 troops, twelve tanks and one helicopter) and nine medium landing ships (capacity 140 troops and six tanks). Source: *The Military Balance --1989-90.* London: IISS, 1989, p. 160.

offensive operations further afield.[38] Nevertheless, the crucial role of the Hermes and its Sea Harriers in the British operations in the Falklands War was obviously noted by Indian naval strategists.

There are no indications that India intends to add additional carriers in the future, nor is it likely to given the enormous costs of acquiring, and operating, these most expensive of naval ships. This does not leave India with much flexibility in developing a strategy for its carrier operations because three vessels is the absolute minimum required to maintain at least one on permanent station in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, aircraft carriers cannot sail unescorted but require a full complement of warships in the supporting carrier task force. It is inconceivable that India would be prepared to tie up so many of its naval assets in such a narrow carrier protection role. Nevertheless, despite their limitations, Indin's aircraft carriers are potentially capable of fulfilling important sea-control functions within the bounds of their operational environment. They would pose a considerable strategic problem for most of the littoral states in the Indian Ocean but it must be noted that the carriers would themselves be vulnerable to land-based air attack by advanced planes such as the F-16s of Pakistan and Singapore and the F-18s of Australia.

Whereas a full sea-control capability may not be attainable, a sea-denial capacity may well be and the Indian navy appears to be pursuing such a strategy. Carriers are essentially sea-control instruments, but submarines are used for sea-denial purposes. It is significant that the underwater element has seen the fastest growth in the Indian navy. India's submarine fleet comprises seventeen vessels: one nuclear-powered Soviet *Charlie*-class; six Soviet *Kilo*-class; eight Soviet *Foxtrot*-class; and two West German *T-209*-class. The first Indian-assembled *T-209* was launched in October 1989. The build-up of the submarine fleet will provide India with mobile defence and interdiction forces in the crucial western approaches to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea where there are limited opportunities for New Delhi to establish forward bases. The security of the sea route from the Gulf will become increasingly important as India's

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[38] India's Sea Harriers appear most likely to be used in an interceptor role in the approaches to India. The Sea Kings are obviously charged with defending the carriers from submarine attack.

dependence on imported oil increases in the years to come. For the moment, however, infrastructural and naval force developments indicate that it is the eastern approaches to the Indian Ocean which most concern New Delhi. India is wary of China's growing influence in Southeast Asia and has noted Beijing's willingness to use naval force against Vietnam to secure its interests in the disputed Spratly islands.[39] In this sense, Indian naval developments, including the establishment of forward defences in the Andaman islands, are expressly geared towards securing the key choke point in the east -- the Strait of Malacca.

The Impact of Chinese Naval Developments on Indian Naval Strategy

India is clearly the dominant power in South Asia but China has the potential to dominate Southeast Asia in a mirror-image of its historical hegemony over Indochina. Because of geography, Indian and Chinese interests overlap in the countries of Southeast Asia but their rivalry is most likely to focus on their maritime presence in the region. Whereas China has begun to develop a modern blue-water navy, which will enable it to increase its power projection capability in coming years, even Indian analysts recognize that Beijing is unlikely to develop a capability to engage in gunboat diplomacy as far away as the Indian Ocean for a long time to come. Nevertheless, Chinese naval developments have long concerned New Delhi, particularly when viewed in terms of Beijing's arms supply relationships with Bangladesh and Pakistan. New Delhi's phobia about being surrounded by its enemies is reinforced by the fact that most of Bangladesh's military equipment, including naval vessels, comes from China and Chinese-Pakistani military ties are strong. Most recently, rumours abound in Pakistan -- and no doubt India -- that Beijing will soon offer a nuclear-powered submarine to Islamabad.[40]

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[39] The Spratly islands lie in the South China Sea midway between Vietnam, Borneo and the Philippines. The islands are the subject of claims by China, Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines and Malaysia and were the scene of naval clashes between Vietnam and China in 1988.

[40] Private conversations with Pakistani defence analysts and Western defence attaches during author's research trips to Pakistan. See also: *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, November 1990.

Given these conditions, China's development of forward naval facilities in the southern Guangzhou Military Region, the development of outposts on the Paracel and Spratly islands and a "historical tradition" of Chinese naval activity in the Indian Ocean make New Delhi suspicious of Beijing's maritime objectives towards its region.[41] The warming trend in Sino-Soviet relations compounds India's insecurity because, from New Delhi's perspective, it presents Beijing with the opportunity to redeploy forces from its borders with the Soviet Union to face India. Indeed, Vietnam and India share many of the same apprehensions about Chinese expansionism into Southeast Asia and the on-going dispute over the Spratly Islands has already brought Hanoi and Beijing into conflict. As Soviet-Vietnamese ties loosen, the security matrix in Southeast Asia will undergo unpredictable changes in which a perceived power vacuum is likely to lead to greater Chinese involvement in the region. Nor is China's growing interest in Southeast Asia limited to its military presence; it is noteworthy that China and Indonesia have recently announced the restoration of diplomatic relations after a break of twenty-three years and that Singapore is also being courted by Beijing.[42]

In combination, China's active naval presence in the South China Sea, its growing political ties in Southeast Asia and its long-standing military relationships with Bangladesh and Pakistan will continue to give impetus to New Delhi's efforts to reinforce its security perimeter in the vicinity of the Strait of Malacca. Given the emphasis in Chinese naval strategy on submarine warfare, it is perhaps not surprising that India appears to be developing a sea-denial strategy to meet future threats to its interests. The development of a sea-denial capability, rather than a sea-control capability, poses potentially serious problems for any naval power wishing to challenge New Delhi's dominance in the Indian Ocean. Even if its surface fleet is destroyed, the Indian navy will still be capable of denying free reign of the ocean to any other power. This will particularly be the case should India acquire a substantial fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

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[41] "Historical tradition" might be too strong a term from a Western perspective but the ancient cultures of China and India have produced a long institutionalised memory which overlooks the fact that China deployed naval ships into the Indian Ocean only in 1985 -- the first time since the voyages of the Ming dynasty admiral Zheng He in the fifteenth century.

[42] *Globe & Mail*, July 5, 1990.

The dissuasive potential, and strategic reach, of a nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine was clearly demonstrated in the Falklands conflict and it is unlikely that Indian naval planners missed the lesson. Given the training role of the INS *Chakra*, it is highly probable that India has embarked on a major programmeme to procure more such vessels. It is generally accepted that the Indian navy will ultimately operate six nuclear-powered vessels of the *Sierra* or *Victor* class.[43] Both types of submarine are capable of carrying nuclear weapons and India has demonstrated its ability to produce sophisticated missiles as well as a "peaceful" nuclear explosion. Therefore, a potentially nuclear-armed, as well as nuclear-powered, Indian submarine fleet must be considered a distinct possibility at some point in the future.[44] At this stage, however, it is more pertinent to address the question of the nuclear-powered submarine acquisition programmeme in terms of its political implications.

The Soviet Connection in Indian Naval Expansion

The fact that the nuclear-powered submarine has been "leased" from the Soviet Union raises speculation about future Soviet involvement in India's naval strategy. Whether or not "leasing" is a euphemism for "giving" remains to be seen, but it is not a practice unique to Indo-Soviet military relations. The United States has recently leased eight frigates to Pakistan and has followed this procedure in the past. Such arrangements are partly designed to assuage regional security concerns and to give a measure of comfort to the opposing superpower. They also save the recipient considerable expenditure and provide a quick and effective means of

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[43] See: McKinley, op cit. p. 25. The same figure was given to the author in a conversation with a Pakistani naval officer.

[44] A second nuclear-powered submarine was expected to be transferred to India in 1989 but has not materialized. It is widely rumoured that Indian crews have not mastered the nuclear technology on the Chakra and that safety considerations may be holding up further transfers from Moscow. Alternatively, cost factors and/or a change in Moscow's position with respect to New Delhi's stance on nuclear non-proliferation may account for the apparent slowing down of the nuclear submarine program. See note 46 below.

enhancing a small state's naval force capability. In the case of the nuclear-powered submarine lease, however, there are more complex issues to consider.

Nuclear-powered submarines require supplies of nuclear fuel and, more importantly, a means by which to treat and dispose of the spent fuel. India clearly has problems in meeting the requirements of its nuclear energy industry from indigenous sources and has experienced particular shortfalls in heavy-water production.[45] A leasing arrangement with Moscow would alleviate any problems India might have in fuelling its submarine.

Of more significance, it has been suggested that the Soviet Union may have been concerned about possible Indian diversions of the spent fuel for use in its nuclear weapons programmeme and that by leasing the submarine Moscow gains some reassurance that it will not contribute to nuclear proliferation in South Asia.[46] In fact, the significance of the nuclear-submarine leasing more probably lies in the naval competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean. That a nuclear-powered submarine also meets India's requirements with respect to its perception of a threat from China is possibly a happy coincidence.[47]

Although the Indian Ocean is obviously a lesser concern to Soviet strategists than is the Pacific, it is an area where the Soviet Union has the potential to make wide-ranging and considerable political mileage, and important strategic gains, at relatively little cost. Despite the heightened attention brought about by the current crisis with Iraq, the Indian Ocean remains

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[45] See: Manchanda, Rita, "Heavy-water Drought," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 31 August 1989, pp. 18-19. Reports that the Ceausescu regime in Romania improperly diverted Norwegian heavy water to India in 1986 confirm that India's nuclear programme relies on outside help, see: *India Abroad*, May 4, 1990.

[46] See: "Indian Navy In The 1980s," *Spotlight On Regional Affairs*, Vol. VII, No. 12. December 1988. Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, pp. 13-14.

[47] The Soviet Union may be re-thinking its nuclear transfer policy. A recent article in Izvestia sharply criticized India's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- the first indication that Moscow might be concerned about New Delhi's nuclear ambitions. *India Abroad*, May 11, 1990.

fundamentally a strategic backwater for the superpowers. As such, the Indian Ocean presents opportunities for Gorbachev to pursue an essential requirement of his foreign policy: it is an area where the prime objective of reducing the strategic vulnerability of the Soviet Union can be achieved through political means. In a sense, the Indian Ocean has become a theatre in which Gorbachev is seeking to turn US strategic dominance into a Soviet political advantage through the deft manipulation of the relationship between the regional countries and the United States.

An examination of Soviet activities in the region since Gorbachev's watershed speech on Soviet-Asian relations at Vladivostok in July 1986, reveals a pattern of political initiatives that have promoted the Soviet Union as progressive and accommodating in the pursuit of regional peace and harmony. Soviet policy pronouncements have reproduced the Association of South East Asian Nations'(ASEAN) calls for Southeast Asia to be free of nuclear weapons and are supportive of the 1971 concept of a Zone Of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) for the region.[48] The Soviet Union has consistently supported the United Nations' declaration of 1971 on making the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace and has repeatedly urged Washington to begin a new round of Indian Ocean Naval Arms Limitation Talks (NALTs).[49] More importantly, Moscow has reduced its military commitments throughout the Indian Ocean region -- the withdrawal from Afghanistan being the most obvious manifestation of Gorbachev's determination to rein in Brezhnev's Third World adventurism.

Historically, the basic motivations that have driven Soviet policy in the Indian Ocean region have been to contain Chinese ideological influence among the littoral states -- notably in East Africa -- and to reduce any strategic threat from the United States. Other reasons given

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[48] Nor has Moscow confined its comments to Southeast Asia, it also supports the Rarotonga Treaty in the South Pacific and has called for the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the Korean peninsula.

[49] A series of Naval Arms Limitation Talks were entered into by the US and the USSR in early 1977. After four meetings the talks were suspended by Washington as a result of Soviet activity during the Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia. See this author's, "Superpower Rivalry In The Indian Ocean," CIIPS Working Paper #16, February 1989, p. 28.

for the presence of Soviet military forces in the Indian Ocean, such as the need to protect the sea lanes linking the European and Asian regions of the Soviet Union, are purely ancillary. Rivalry with China for ideological influence has largely dissipated with the warming trend in Sino-Soviet relations and because of the general disenchantment with socialism as a means to meet the economic and developmental requirements in most of Africa. The potential strategic threat from the United States remains centred on the major US naval facility on the island of Diego Garcia, which supports US naval deployments in the Arabian Sea, and serves as a forward base for elements of the Central Command, or Rapid Deployment Force.[50]

In recent years, Washington has been unwilling to reduce its naval forces in the Indian Ocean because of the threat to energy supplies from the Persian Gulf arising out of the Iran-Iraq war, and because the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was perceived to be a potential danger to the Gulf and Pakistan. With the end of hostilities between Iran and Iraq, and as a result of their withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Soviets were in a strong position to push again for arms limitations in the Indian Ocean.[51] Gorbachev picked up on this inherent weakness in Washington's position in his Vladivostok speech where he reiterated Soviet support for making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace: "We remain strongly in favour of resuming the talks on turning the Indian Ocean into a peace zone."[52] However, this was the sum of Gorbachev's reference to the Indian Ocean in what is widely regarded as the definitive policy pronouncement on the future of Soviet-Asian relations.

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[50] There is no Soviet position which remotely matches Diego Garcia in capacity or potential, which of itself explains why the NALTS talks have remained in abeyance since the Ogaden War of 1977-78. Moscow has nothing to give up in any regional arms limitation agreement with the United States. Any prospects for re-opening the NALTs talks effectively collapsed following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

[51] As in the case of Southeast Asia, a US refusal to discuss arms reductions in the Indian Ocean could have been damaging to Washington's relationships in the region and might have gained Moscow considerable political mileage. This approach is now moot as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

[52] See: *Press Bulletin*, No. 38, Ottawa: Press Office of the USSR Embassy in Canada, July 30, 1986, p. 12.

In later speeches Gorbachev did pay more attention to the Indian Ocean, perhaps in response to Indian pressure, but also undoubtedly out of the realization that significant gains could be made there. Accordingly, during his four-day visit to India in November 1986, Gorbachev said:

> ... the Soviet Union and India support the United Nations decision to convene not later than in 1988, an international conference for the purpose of implementing the United Nations declaration on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. Demilitarization of the Indian Ocean must finally get underway."[53]

In an interview with the Merdeka newspaper in Indonesia the following July, Gorbachev continued his confidence-building theme and argued that: "...there are many useful things that could be done to strengthen security in the Indian Ocean."[54] More specifically, he highlighted the uncooperative US attitude towards the concept of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace:

> The United Nations adopted the declaration on making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace more than 15 years ago. For a number of years, preparatory work has been going on to convene, under the aegis of the United Nations, an international conference on the Indian Ocean. ... However, we still cannot be sure that it will take place, for experience shows that as soon as the talks begin to make progress Washington foils them.[55]

Obviously, this leaves the United States on the horns of a dilemma. If it does not respond positively to the Soviet challenge by showing a willingness to reduce its forces in the region, it runs the risk of alienating regional influentials such as India and Indonesia. However, if Washington does make significant reductions in its force levels in the Indian Ocean then it is mortgaging its regional strategic concerns to its uncertain future relations with the regional states. Moscow essentially has nothing to lose and everything to gain from Washington's

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[53] See: *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (Soviet Union), p. D9, November 28, 1986.

[54] See: "Mikhail Gorbachev's Replies To Questions Put By The Indonesian Newspaper *Merdeka*, July 21, 1987." Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987, p. 9.

[55] *Ibid.*

quandary. A greatly reduced US naval presence in the Indian Ocean would represent a significant strategic gain to the Soviet Union because of the surrogate force it has created in the Indian Navy.

Relations between Moscow and New Delhi are long-standing and mutually beneficial. The Soviets have consistently been faithful to India's self-image as a great power and have actively stroked New Delhi's ego through the judicious distribution of advanced weapons systems. Apart from supplying India with the first nuclear-powered submarine ever offered to a developing country, the Soviet Union has also outfitted the Indian air force with the top of the line *MiG-29* fighter aircraft. The Soviets have also been keen to sell their long-range *Tu-142M* naval reconnaissance aircraft to India. Indeed, Gorbachev has encouraged New Delhi to play a more independent role in the region.

It is important to note, however, that even though India aspires to become the dominant power in the Indian Ocean and to deny any extra-regional power a role in the affairs of South Asia, its military potential is tied to Soviet largesse. The clearest evidence, of course, lies in the leasing of the nuclear-powered submarine from Moscow, which also demonstrates that India is not yet in a position to pursue an unambiguously independent regional security agenda. In spite of this, Moscow's influence over India has limitations and is facing a decline. The Soviet Union simply cannot provide India with the technological expertise it needs to expand its industrial base, nor is Moscow a fruitful market for India's exports. There is a growing awareness in India that closer ties with the West, and the United States in particular, are essential if it is to develop fully its economic and military potential. Nobody is predicting an about turn in India's basic foreign policy orientation, but Moscow must be somewhat concerned at the prospect of ultimately losing its influence over the Indian military. Therefore, it seems somewhat strange that discussion of the leasing of the nuclear-powered submarine invariably revolves around India's possible purpose in acquiring such a weapons system. The more interesting question concerns Soviet motivations in supplying India with the submarine. By offering nuclear-powered submarines to India, the Soviet Union retains New Delhi's good-will, fosters continued Indian military dependence on Moscow, reinforces India's image as a

great power and immeasurably complicates US naval strategy in the Indian Ocean for the future.

It is perhaps more significant that the submarine lease coincides with a trend towards reducing the presence of both superpowers in the Indian Ocean region. Step by step, the major points of contention between Moscow and Washington over the last decade are being resolved. At the same time, Moscow's geopolitical relationship with India -- and New Delhi's with the Soviet Union -- is changing as relations with the United States and China evolve in the present period of detente. Although there is a general trend towards detente at the superpower level, and a decline in superpower interest and presence in the Indian Ocean region, it is evident that India will play a broader regional role in the future and this will inherently pose greater problems for the United States than for the Soviets. This, in part, explains the Soviet willingness to help India build up its naval force projection capability. Certain complementary interests encourage continued Indo-Soviet defence cooperation -- Moscow is interested in further reducing the US threat from the Indian Ocean, and New Delhi wants to be the dominant naval power in the region. In pursuit of its objective, the Soviet Union has nothing to fear from an Indian "blue water" navy whereas the United States, with its naval base at Diego Garcia and its regular deployments in the Indian Ocean, will ultimately have to come to terms with India's maritime power potential.

Economic Limitations to Further Naval Growth

The economic factors influencing the evolution of the Indo-Soviet military relationship raise important questions about the prospects for Indian defence policy and spending. As the 1990s progress and Soviet economic problems demand the end to concessional pricing for arms exports, Moscow will face a declining market in India for its main battle tanks, light combat aircraft, conventional submarines and frigates. At the same time, in keeping with New Delhi's general autarchic economic policy, the desire to indigenise the arms industry will likely remain a fundamental policy goal for any Indian government. This obviously has important implications across a broad spectrum of economic activity from domestic employment generation to off-

setting India's balance of payments deficit. Of more significance in terms of India's regional objectives, a decline in Soviet military subsidies in conjunction with increased domestic defence production, will require a reappraisal of India's security posture. Indian policymakers seem intent on making the country the regional superpower but the contrast between domestic poverty and growing military spending is of increasing concern:

> Rupees 8,728 Crore is a lot of money. When properly spent, it can house millions of poor people, educate at least 5 million Indians, and electrify 11 cities the size of Bombay. If India chooses to allocate that amount to developmental activities, it can make some concrete efforts to alleviate rural poverty. But India chooses to spend the money on defence.[56]

For the foreseeable future, New Delhi will not be able to afford to be the dominant power in South Asia *and* to develop a major maritime role in the Indian Ocean. The trend towards greater cooperation with the United States indicates that New Delhi has come to this conclusion.

Developments in the US-Indian Relationship

Both Washington and New Delhi appear to have come to the realization that cooperation in the pursuit of mutual interests in the Indian Ocean region is preferable to the traditional animosity that has guided their relationship. From Washington's perspective, India is the logical "regional policeman" and can play a valuable role as a stabilizing force in the Indian Ocean when the US is under increasing economic and political pressure to reduce its overseas military commitments. At the same time, India's growing dependence on oil from the Gulf makes New Delhi less inclined to criticize US efforts to safeguard those supplies. Therefore, a new understanding between India and the United States seems to be emerging in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Washington's support for Indian interventions in Sri Lanka and the Maldives

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[56] Tripathi, Salil. "Armed to Impoverishment." *Imprint*, November 1986, p. 14. (1 crore = 10 million rupees). See also, Dutt, Ela. "Military spending grows at expense of poor," *India Abroad*, February 10, 1989.

-- and most recently its neutral stance on Kashmir -- have been recompensed by a New Delhi's greater acceptance of the US role in the region.

Whether or not there is a correlation, India's anti-American rhetoric has faded since the Sri Lanka operation and relations have steadily improved between Washington and New Delhi. It is too early to predict whether this new relationship will lead to a mutually satisfactory balance of naval forces in the Indian Ocean. It is unlikely that the Indian naval build-up will lead to clashes with the United States under foreseeable circumstances, nevertheless, it is equally unlikely that New Delhi will quietly accept any enhancement of the US position in the region. As the stimulus for Washington's naval presence in the Indian Ocean remains the security situation in the Persian Gulf, and given its past support of Indian interventions in the region, the prospects for an increased level of US activity to a degree that would upset New Delhi seem remote.

Conclusion

There are probably a mixture of motives driving Indian naval policy and New Delhi obviously has a legitimate right to defend its many interests in the Indian Ocean. Beyond the legitimate economic need to control its large EEZ, it has been argued that India's objective is to prevent loss of flexibility and control in the Indian Ocean by creating a strong, permanent presence throughout the region. Like the late argument regarding the need for Canadian nuclear-powered submarines in the Arctic, New Delhi believes that if its forces are not patrolling the Indian Ocean, somebody else's will be. Therefore, to demonstrate an active assertion of a national security interest, it is necessary to deny other naval powers free reign in the Indian Ocean. Clearly, the potential of a future threat from China is also a consideration.

Others hold that the naval build-up simply reflects an emotional response to India's need to be recognised as a legitimate regional power. A strong fleet suits India's perception of itself as an emerging power with regional security responsibilities and a leadership role in the Third World. In addition, the prestige attached to the acquisition of a nuclear-powered submarine and

aircraft carriers should not be discounted. The naval expansion can therefore be viewed as a response to all those -- particularly in the United States -- who are not persuaded that India really is moving toward great power status. As one analyst has put it: "The American image of India is still dominated by snake charmers, naked fakirs, and starving peasants."[57] A navy deploying nuclear-powered submarines would ensure India of the recognition it feels it deserves as a major world power -- a recognition which heretofore only the Soviet Union has consistently granted, and continues to grant.

It is unclear what limits India sees to its growing power profile. If it is to be confined to the Indian Ocean region, no policy statements indicate to what degree the navy and the South Asian Doctrine support each other. As yet, there is no indication that the Indian navy, with its recognised power projection limitations, has an identifiable role beyond the Indian Ocean. The lack of a declared policy explaining the naval build-up, and the conspicuous absence of a maritime threat to India's position, offers a clue to the nature of New Delhi's naval developments.

Military expansion in general, and naval build-ups in particular, require long lead times before construction is completed. The force structure emerging in India's navy today reflects responses to threat perceptions from at least ten years ago -- and almost certainly earlier -- that do not have a bearing on contemporary strategic circumstances. India appears to have entered the naval competition in the Indian Ocean on the basis of a perceived threat to its security stemming from the Enterprise incident during the Bangladesh war and Western responses to crises in the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia. If, as postulated, India chose to build-up its maritime forces in response to increased levels of superpower involvement in the region, then its build-up continues in response to circumstances that have lost their momentum. Indeed, there will likely be a continuing decline in extra-regional force levels in the Indian Ocean once the Iraq crisis is settled.

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[57] Harrison, Selig. *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1984.

Because New Delhi has failed to explain the purpose of its naval build-up, its neighbours feel threatened by its actions and have responded in kind. Some of the key littoral states have already reacted to India's naval expansion by enhancing their forces and improving their facilities. Indonesia, Pakistan and Australia, for example, have all noted and responded to India's moves at the political and military level. Whereas such moves are unquestionably justified under the circumstances, the naval arms race in the Indian Ocean appears to be following a course that has little bearing on the real, or potential, security concerns of the participants.

Fortunately, the situation suggests that India's naval build-up is approaching a crucial turning point at which New Delhi's leading role in setting the pace of a naval arms race will soon become counter-productive -- even discounting its growing economic constraints. The more India continues to increase its naval power projection capability, the more likely it is to find its neighbours doing the same. Moreover, the more threatening India appears to be, the less likely it is that the United States will be prepared to cede responsibility for Indian Ocean security to New Delhi.

In the long-term, India's determination to control its immediate geopolitical environment appears to put it on a collision course with traditional patterns of power relationships in the region. However, there must be a significant development of its maritime capability before India can aspire to meaningful regional power status and a substantial reduction in the American presence in the Indian Ocean would also be a prerequisite. Even in that eventuality, other limiting factors are likely to prevent India from achieving clear title to the mantle of regional dominance.

Apart from economic constraints, there are unanswered questions about the navy's effectiveness. India's naval forces are split by country of origin, with Western-built ships stationed on the west coast at Bombay and Soviet ones on the east coast at Vishakapatnam. The logistical problems associated with the mix of components India uses in its fleet further complicates already difficult training processes and effective maintenance. The ships may look impressive but they are very much an untried element of the Indian armed forces.

When India's rising ethnic tensions and continuing regional disparities are taken into consideration -- stresses that have required large military responses within India in recent years -- then clearly the drain on the defence budget may limit further growth in naval power projection capability. Any broadening of traditional threat perceptions, as illustrated by the current Kashmir crisis, would impose further financial strains when the country's total foreign debt is growing.[58] The defence budget has risen steadily for a decade, including a 31% leap in 1986-87. In the March 1989 budget it fell by 1.5%, or 8 to 9% after inflation, and reductions in spending were allotted to the army (5%), navy (2.2%) and ordnance factories (259%).[59] This was only a temporary interruption to established patterns of defence spending. In the 1990-91 budget, defence allocations increased by Rs. 12.50 billion over the Rs. 14.50 billion provided for in the revised defence spending for 1989-90. According to Finance Minister Madhu Dandavate, the increase in defence spending "is not of our choice. It is the direct result of the situation on our borders."[60]

India is clearly emerging as a naval power too big to ignore, but its complete dependence on the Soviet Union for nuclear-powered submarine procurements raises questions about the level of autonomy it will enjoy if it wishes to become a superpower in the Indian Ocean region. Nevertheless, India's self-image as the dominant regional power requires that it maintain a "credible" defence posture against its enemies. The prestige-driven interpretation of India's naval policy seems to be more plausible than the security-oriented posture argued by some Indian officials. The obvious point of reference is that there is no identifiable threat to India's security which requires the kind of build-up underway. Most importantly, there is a noticeable lack of policy driving the acquisition of submarines and aircraft carriers.

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[58] India has decided to borrow in the commercial markets to adjust its balance of payments. Its US$49 billion total foreign debt, up from $32 billion in 1984, looks set to reach US$68 billion by 1995. *South*, February 1989, p. 29.

[59] *Indian Express*, March 1, 1989.

[60] The increase "will meet essential requirements and commitments of the defense services."*India Abroad* March 23, 1990. *India Today* reports that the increase represents *only* 8.6% over the revised estimate for 1989-90. (emphasis added) *India Today*, April 15, 1990.

The route India has taken to naval expansion, with its emphasis on force projection surface vessels and a strong submarine force, is at first look alarming. Perhaps the motto on India's newest carrier, the *Viraat* holds the key to Indian maritime policy: *Jalmev Yasya, Balmev Tasya* (The one who controls the sea is all powerful). However, in assessing the significance of India's naval expansion, some perspicacity is in order. Concern fades when it is noted that India is not developing the kind of support network that would turn its impressive navy into a powerful force capable of initiating large-scale interventions over a wide area. Nor does India have the technical skills or economic strength to sustain its naval development without relying at some stage on outside powers. Besides, the submarine building programmeme faces cut-backs and domestic economic constraints appear likely to slow the continuing acquisition of advanced warships.[61] This will particularly be the case should India's expensive missile programme continue.

Nevertheless, no matter what government is in power in New Delhi, India will continue to strive to be recognised as a legitimate regional, and ultimately, global power. Under the circumstances, some vigilance is in order. India's naval expansion is out of place in an era when economic strength has largely supplanted military power as a means by which to measure the strength of nations. In the final analysis:

> The buildup has taken on a momentum of its own, and India is increasingly pushed to find a threat and rationale to justify its military strength.[62]

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[61] See: *India Abroad*, March 10, 1989.

[62] Thomas P. Thornton quoted in, Munro, Ross H. "Superpower Rising," *Time*, April 3, 1989 p. 7.

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